Slutskaya et al. (2016) Masculinity and Class in the Context of Dirty Work

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A study was conducted to explore the effects of having “dirty” or undervalued jobs such as street cleaning and trash collecting had on working class men’s perceptions of themselves and their masculinity (Slutskaya et al. 2016, 165). These occupations were picked chosen because they are associated with masculinity, not only because of their grimier function in society, but also because of the physical demands made of the worker (Slutskaya et al. 2016,166). The method employed for conducting interviews was also very deliberate. Research teams of one man and one woman would go with the cleaning teams for several days and participate in the work while gathering information (Slutskaya et al. 2016, 171). This created a better dynamic between the anthropologists and the workers by putting the street crews in a position of power, as they were more comfortable in the situation, and had the role of teaching the interviewers how to perform the job.

In order to reassert their masculinities and defy the devaluation that is inherent to their social position, “dirty” workers resort to more prize conventional traits to prize, such as physical endurance, and work an ethic of hard work (Slutskaya et al. 2016, 172). They pride themselves on their ability to keep continual pay be paid continually, very similar to the way that white collar workers prize career advancement. The idea that “not everybody can do this job” is very prevalent, giving the blue collar workers a self-esteem boost and a perch from which to look down upon the “softer” white collar workers. This is very similar to an example given in the core reading by Edley (2017: 90-1), where men had to rationalize and rebuild their worldviews as it applied to their jobs in sales (2017, 90 – 91). Since sales is seen as a more feminine job, the men that dominate that sector choose to construe their work in a different light- instead of being eager to please and trying to perform for others, they engage in a highly demanding contest of wills, where it is necessary to take a few hits to sacrifice some personal pride in order to get ahead. Instead of seeing their jobs as womanlike, now the salesman says that women lack the instincts, social reflexes, and determination to get the job done.

This article was written based on data gathered from white working class men, since they are a group that has experienced more and more disadvantages since de-industrialization. The authors mentioned that they were also going to find data relevant to non-white workers, but this didn’t really happen in a satisfactory way (Slutskaya et al. 2016, 165). Migrant workers and immigrants are mentioned in a cursory manner to discuss how foreigners are seen as competition and are looked down upon because they take work for lesser pay. This has become a particular issue as the market has become very competitive as governments are more often higher private companies with workers that are much cheaper than the government employed ones (Slutskaya et al. 2016, 177). The unions have significantly less power because of this, and so workers have to take a lot more flak word choice is a bit too informal from employers than previously. But this doesn’t really discuss the masculinities of non-white working class men, or how they impact the white men in similar situations. Nicely done, see rubric below.

References Cited

Edley, Nigel


Reference is in same format as syllabus (e.g., American Antiquity style): yes no minor issues

Entry is concise and informative about the content of the article: Excellent good adequate needs work

Entry connects the resource reading to the core readings: Excellent good adequate needs work

Entry shows evidence of critical thought: Excellent good adequate needs work

Writing style: Excellent good adequate needs work